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Is Kashmir under military occupation? Why that's not rhetoric and why it's important to answer the question



By Parvaiz Bukhari

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Parvaiz Bukhari: Hello and welcome to The Polis Podcast. I am Parvaiz Bukhari, a journalist based in Indian-controlled Kashmir. I am happy today to be having this conversation with Kartik Murukutla.

Kartik is a lawyer, who worked in the Office of the Prosecutor at the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, before moving to Kashmir. Thank you Kartik for agreeing to have this conversation with me. Before we begin talking about Kashmir and your engagement with the legal landscape of this disputed territory, please tell us a little about yourself and what got you interested in looking at Kashmir.

Kartik Murukutla: Thank you for having me on the podcast. I worked at the United Nations (UN) for five years

before I left in 2008. I learnt a great deal working at the UN, at the tribunal, looking at prosecution of serious crimes in post-conflict Rwanda. While I was there, but particularly once I left and thought back on my experience, I often wondered about what it would be like to work in a different situation dealing with similar crimes; what it would mean to do this in a place in my region, if I can use that word. I'm from the south of India, I hadn't worked much in India. I was [a] little familiar with [such] work in Kashmir and what was happening here, particularly some of the work done by the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS)—for which I have now ended up working for seven years.

I read their report, which was released in 2009, on unmarked graves across the countryside. These were places where bodies were buried and no one knew the identities of these bodies. But clearly these were people who had suffered certain, and possibly serious, crimes. The state version was that they were armed rebels but there was evidence to suggest that they were, or could be, civilians. And the JKCCS had done some work on this issue and asked for further investigations. I thought it was a unique report that looked at crimes within the local context but [also] sought to look at the application of international law, very similar to what I had learnt at the UN. So that's what got me interested in Kashmir—looking at a

situation of serious crimes while a conflict is going on, a local group doing it, and doing it with the application of international law. And that's why I first came to Kashmir and began my work here.

I should say, as I now leave (*this podcast was conducted in October 2018*), coincidentally after seven years, I think I've learnt a lot about conflict, about international law, and about Kashmir. But I think, importantly, I've learnt a great deal about what it means to be a lawyer—what sort of engagement is required, what sort of a legal intervention is required—in these very difficult situations.

PB: Before we go further, you said you worked with the JKCCS. Tell us a little bit about it.

KM: The JKCCS is a civil society group. It's non-funded and was formalised in the year 2000. It has seen a collection of people coming and going, being associated in various forms. It is not affiliated with any political party or any government. It has committed itself to looking at the core issues... the fundamental issues of the right to self-determination, the ongoing movement, and human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir. My work with the JKCCS has been limited to human rights or, more specifically, the ongoing crimes and violations and reporting,

documentation, and litigation around it. But the JKCCS tries to intervene in this very difficult situation in a number of different ways.

PB: We are talking about Kashmir here, which is one of the longest-pending disputes at the United Nations awaiting resolution since 1947, when the first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, referred it to the world body. It's a territory tucked in the Himalayas and divided between India and Pakistan.

The two countries have fought wars over it and it remains at the centre of their rivalry and tension in South Asia. Both of these countries—neighbours and bitter rivals—lay claim to this former kingdom but, more importantly, a movement for self-determination has been ongoing here for more than a few decades before the partition of the Indian subcontinent. Kashmiris finally took to arms in 1989 after a long, peaceful struggle for political rights that led to the Indian-controlled part of the region becoming one of the most heavily militarised spots in the world today. Estimates range between 500,000 and 700,000 Indian soldiers deployed to control the region.

Kartik, tell me about the projects you've involved yourself with in the years that you have lived and worked in Kashmir.

KM: Broadly, three areas. The JKCCS and some other groups have looked at

human rights violations, its nature and different patterns. When I first arrived here, there was some work beginning, which I then joined and continued for seven years. Going beyond the crimes, we started to identify individuals in the state structures responsible for these crimes.

So, first, I was involved in two reports, which have been published—[*Alleged Perpetrators*], which essentially looked at individual criminal responsibility, and *Structures of Violence*. As with the tribunals which I'd done, this was, in a post-conflict situation, going back to [events] that had occurred and looking at who was most responsible for it. Through these reports, the JKCCS, amidst an ongoing conflict, has in a very responsible way tried to look at who is responsible; tried to look at the structures beyond the individual perpetrators who actually pulled the trigger or committed the crime going up the chain of command; and tried to use international criminal law jurisprudence and applying it to Kashmir. That was one effort I was a part of.

Second was the ongoing litigation in courts. The JKCCS, headed by Advocate Imroz, has for decades been a part of an effort to bring these people who are responsible to the courts and to push the state apparatus to investigate them. This is an extremely challenging idea

and perhaps we will discuss it further:
to actually try and push the state to
prosecute itself. It's been a challenge for
lawyers beyond Mr. Imroz for years now
and there have been learnings, and
there has been an evolution in the
process as well, and it's something I was
briefly a part of.

And third was the ongoing engagement
of human rights groups and the JKCCS
in Kashmir with the UN. In June [2018],
the first ever high
commissioner's report was released—
the Office of the High Commissioner for
Human Rights in Geneva came out with
this very important report on both sides
(Indian- and Pakistani-controlled) of
Jammu and Kashmir. I was part of some
of the efforts of the organisation over
the years to engage with the UN.

PB: You talked about this long
engagement, this long list of alleged
crimes and alleged perpetrators. But
one rarely hears anything about
reparations or justice having been
delivered. It looks like a cul-de-sac in so
many ways. So in that kind of a
scenario, could you talk about a
particular instance in which a lot of
work on documentation and explaining
has gone. And, in that sense, and as you
described what's happening in Kashmir
today, what does the UN and the Indian
and international humanitarian law as
it exists and as it is practiced mean?

KM: Because I see this as a lawyer there may be some manner of inherent bias or prejudice or limited understanding but I certainly believe that in times of conflict, and certainly in Jammu and Kashmir, law has a very important role to play. There are very good critiques of law both domestic and international, of the evolution of law, whom it serves, and the power structures that inform it. And these critiques are crucial. But despite these critiques it is important to understand that law continues to play an important role even in horrific times of lawlessness. So, if you look at Kashmir even now, there are killings on a daily basis on all sides, civilians being killed and retaliations following that and it seems that there is no hope or no role for law anymore and that it doesn't seem to provide any answers. But despite the failures of some of the human rights groups to push all parties to the conflict, including the state, which in many ways is the primary party and can really make a difference in terms of pushing this principle of rule of law forward, I think law plays an important role. Not just in the sense of justice in an individual case but as a minimum standard expected of society, of the state, of the parties involved. And in many ways that is the principle of international law as well. **If you look at the law on armed conflict, the principle is that in the worst of times, in the times of war, there are certain rules which everyone must abide by. And I think**

that spirit, which drives international humanitarian law and should drive all laws, is an important constituent of any conflict. So, there can be critiques of an individual law or an individual legal effort, whether it's going to court or whether it's a specific case. But there is no doubt in my mind that law must continue to guide people in this situation and it must be a part of the conversation, which unfortunately right now is not the case in Kashmir largely because the state refuses to allow that conversation to take place. And the UN is one of those constituents that can play an important role here. So, as an example, the recent report of the High Commissioner was an important intervention. The silence of the UN in the past perhaps was a failure of that institution where I think the UN and the law must be part of conversations that take place, including in the most horrific places such as Kashmir.

PB: You seem to suggest that there has been very little engagement with the legal framework that's available to Kashmir, both in terms of international humanitarian law and Indian law. It might be an unfair question to ask but, considering your experience and a certain kind of engagement in Kashmir, why do you think that engagement with the UN and international humanitarian law or the legal framework available here has not been much?

KM: In my sense, the primary reason is that there's very little space in Kashmir for any fair, independent conversations. The state controls quite successfully most of the space that exists. It controls it through threats and intimidation, but also through other narratives that it seeks to introduce. So, while no conversation in Kashmir is operating in a vacuum—that's true of any space of course—it really is a very difficult place to have seemingly sane, most normal conversations on human rights law and international law and, therefore, the UN as well. **The second reason for certain, as I said before, is that the civil society—and I understand the difficulties with which any civil society operates especially in a space such as Kashmir—has a misunderstanding of what the UN can do and how successful it can be. The UN, in my understanding, is a reflection of the states, how serious nation states are—because they form the UN—and civil society processes.** And the stronger these processes are, and the stronger the states are on these principles, the stronger the UN is bound to be.

I also think that in a choked space with a sense of hopelessness, [there's] an understandable need for quick remedies which the UN may not be able to provide.

I think that's the reason why there has not been much engagement with the UN

processes. It is true not just of Kashmir or Kashmir civil society. Look at the Universal Periodic Review, which is a part of what the UN Human Rights Council does, a peer review system where states review one another. India is now once again a member of the Human Rights Council. That's an experiment still evolving. No one is sure if this nation-state peer review system is going to work. There are fears since the US recently left the Human Rights Council... so it's a larger issue of whether people and nation states want to make the UN work or not. So it's a little unfair to then tell a local population, which is in the middle of an armed conflict, to do more and to be more hopeful when states themselves don't seem very serious. But again, as a lawyer, I believe in the process of a mechanism. I believe these mechanisms are important. I believe these ideals are important. I believe that the only way to ensure that these mechanisms work, and I mean the international framework, is through constant engagement. And the recent UN report should provide some hope to human rights groups and individuals in Kashmir to continue to engage.

PB: That's a very difficult situation described very, very gently, thank you. And we're talking about a long story of rights violations and crimes gone unaddressed and unpunished. That's of course a very long story. But, generally

speaking, what are the kinds of crimes we are talking about here? Where all have Kashmiri people appealed, or where could they appeal, if, like you suggest, there has to be more engagement? Where can that go?

KM: Violence, and this is agreed upon by most observers legal and otherwise, has really increased in the late 1980s. So, for the last three decades, there has been an increased violence against the population in Jammu and Kashmir. One way of describing this violence is, and I think it's a fairly honest representation, that it has been widespread, systematic, and, therefore contrary to what the Indian state on occasion says, it is not violence in the form of aberrations. It has been widespread, systematic, and systemic. There has been a huge militarisation in place for decades now but certainly over the last three decades as well. The nature of crimes has been extra-judicial executions, enforced disappearances, torture, sexual violence, and then a whole host of others acts of violence like destruction of property and very serious curbs on freedom of assembly, political activism, freedom of opinion, and expression—the whole host of freedoms that are guaranteed under international human rights law.

Now, to be fair, much work has not been done yet and it is something that needs to be done, including by the UN who

have the expertise to look at this violence, ask tough questions, and do a legal analysis of whether it amounts to crimes against humanity. For instance, is there an armed conflict in Kashmir? Certainly, in local understanding, there is an ongoing war. It is an armed conflict; there are organised militant or rebel groups. There's certainly an organised state on the ground. There are other nation states involved. Thus it has seemingly the ingredients of an armed conflict and, therefore, the need for the application of international law [for] whether this amounts to crimes against humanity, whether it amounts to genocide, and whether there are war crimes taking place. And I must add these are crimes not just by the state but the non-state as well; an organised non-state has been involved in crimes, some of which has been documented by the JKCCS. There is seemingly a pretty clear policy of the non-state to take certain violent measures. For example: attacks on political activists, attacks on people deemed to be informers, which would be clear violations of international law.

Therefore, while there is certainly a need of more rigorous legal analysis, what you can clearly see is that the violence is widespread, it is systematic, and it is ongoing. There are casualties on all sides, including civilians. And killings, disappearances, torture, and sexual violence is not the entirety of it.

A whole host of other rights and freedoms are routinely violated. Lawyers, activists, victims, family members of victims, and survivors have approached various forums. They've gone to the police and this has been well documented. They've gone to the courts, particularly the courts in Jammu and Kashmir.

The judicial system in Jammu and Kashmir mirrors other states in India; there are local courts in the local districts, there's a High Court, which is a very powerful body that can intervene in situations in a range of ways, and then one court for the entire country, the Supreme Court.

Kashmiri activists and lawyers and individuals have approached the High Court in numerous cases; in certain cases they have approached even the Supreme Court. Then there are human rights commissions, which are quasi-judicial bodies with a focus on human rights issues. There have also been a number of petitions and complaints filed. The tragedy is, and this is fairly undisputed, that not a single armed forces personnel has faced a civilian court trial. There have been certain internal court martial processes that have taken place and certain officials of the local police have faced certain civilian court trials. But by and large there has been no fair investigation, and no prosecution of anyone. So there have

been efforts at the local levels, the courts, the commissions, and the executive but it hasn't worked so far.

PB: So it seems to be, in the broadest categorisation, two sets of crimes. One for which the local people, who are at the receiving end of these crimes, can approach the local courts at different levels even as it seems not much justice has been forthcoming. But then there is this other set of crimes like disappearances and torture reported very widely during the last three decades. And as far as I understand, correct me if I'm wrong, there is no remedial process or structure available for Kashmiris to appeal for justice in those crimes. So what has happened in case of, for example, three crimes, let's say, enforced disappearances, torture, and sexual violence?

KM: India has not ratified the conventions on disappearances or torture. There is no crime of torture or disappearances on the statute books today [in India] and that holds the same for Kashmir. There are a series of other crimes that don't completely add up, if I may use that phrase, to disappearances or torture. So it's true for disappearances and torture, there is no remedy. If a person has disappeared, there is no criminal law to deal with that situation. You have a series of other crimes like wrongful confinement, which doesn't add up to the entirety and

horror of enforced disappearance. For torture, for example, the law books have a crime of hurt. You can hurt someone, you can grievously hurt someone, but that doesn't add up to what torture means under international law. For sexual violence the law exists and a few years back there was renewed engagement with the law. Amendments were made and the law was broadened. So sexual violence is covered.

I should add that in India we also don't have any method by which you could hold a person at senior levels responsible yet distanced from the physical perpetration of the crime. Under international law, there's the idea of command responsibility where a commander is responsible for the crimes committed by a person acting under him. That doesn't exist [in India]. And of course crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes are not on the statute books in India despite India having signed on to some of the conventions like the genocide convention. This certainly is an issue in India and it has a consequence.

So, in Kashmir, human rights groups have documented the phenomenon of enforced disappearances, perpetrated largely by the state but also some by the non-state. And as I said there's a more fundamental problem and it is not about law in form or about good laws

and bad laws. There appears to be no space for conversation because you can't begin to talk about responsibility for disappearance when the crime doesn't "exist." So despite the documentation by human rights groups, the figures range from estimated 8,000 to 10,000 and even if you cut those figures by one-third, how does one begin to talk about the crime of disappearance when it doesn't exist on the statute books? But of course it goes beyond just the fact that these crimes don't "exist." Like I said, the law on sexual violence can constantly evolve but that isn't the fundamental problem when dealing with sexual violence in Jammu and Kashmir.

The fundamental problem is that there is no willingness on the part of the state to fairly investigate these crimes. In most cases, there is no willingness to even register the complaint. And certainly in the case of torture and sexual violence, which are always difficult crimes to deal with in any society because of various issues such as stigma or fear of reprisals. A torture victim who has been tortured for ten days and released from a camp has to make that difficult choice of whether he wants to now rebuild his life or return to a police station, which is in close proximity of that camp, and wage a brave battle against an individual army officer. How does he do that in a climate where he has seen crimes such as

killings not being dealt with? How does he do that when he sees that the courts don't seem to work? They take too long. And so these choices, which are always difficult, become almost impossible. So you see certain cases of torture and sexual violence—and this is true even in non-conflict situations if you look at India—are not reported or litigated as highly unlike cases of killings where families to some extent choose to file complaints and try and start the journey of seeking justice. Then some leave along the way, some are threatened, some continue, even in Kashmir. Some continue before the courts. There's a very important ongoing case in the Supreme Court of a fake encounter which took place in the year 2000 where the families are still trying and the army officials are named. There's also a rape and torture case from 1991 where the families are still trying and the case is in the Supreme Court. But it's a very difficult situation for people to deal with.

PB: Kartik, could you also briefly talk about the impunity laws enforced by the Indian state in Kashmir?

KM: The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which was introduced in Jammu and Kashmir in 1990 and is also used in some other parts of the region, essentially provides the armed forces certain powers and immunity. Here the standard that the armed forces are

expected to follow when engaging in society, like engaging in firing while entering a house, are lower than under ordinary law. That's one part of it. The other is the immunity section. Under normal criminal law the principle is the moment a crime is committed and the investigating officer finds the evidence, he can act before a court. Under AFSPA, there is one extra step, the "sanction" step. Before the police officer can act to proceed, he must get permission from the executive, the ministries in New Delhi. So, when evidence is collected but the accused is identified to be an army officer, the police cannot proceed directly to the court and take the prosecution forward.

Now there are two points to be made here first. One, permission has largely not been given. New Delhi and the ministries in New Delhi, in the context of Kashmir, have in almost all cases refused to allow the police to proceed and prosecute. The reasons are often very brief. While the access that human rights lawyers and activists have to these documentations is limited, efforts have been made to find out exactly what process these ministries went through to take these decisions. It is pretty much opaque but largely sanction has not been given. The second point is that even under ordinary law in the Indian context, there is also a section which provides for this sanction procedure.

But I think the most important thing about impunity laws in Kashmir is that it is not the major problem. If you just look at the numbers, the cases that have actually reached this “sanction” level are less than a hundred.

So if you look at the crimes that have taken place in Kashmir, the problem of impunity is not so much the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. It is the fact that regular law is not followed. So the policeman does not face a difficulty at that final level of sanction. Rather, the policeman chooses not to file that complaint or simply not to investigate. Or the army refuses to cooperate. So there are a large number of issues before this legal bar [of sanction] that stop justice from being served.

Another law, which is not exactly an impunity law, is the Public Safety Act (PSA). One of the most widespread violations in Kashmir is the manner in which the state has detained individuals like political activists engaged in legitimate political activity—which as per law would be non-violent political activity. So they have targeted human rights activists, they have targeted in a disproportionate manner the youth of Jammu and Kashmir, they have targeted people for writing, for speaking up. And one of the laws used [to do this] is the PSA, by which individuals can be detained through an administrative measure and, after being detained, the

person is not taken to the court neither does he have access to a lawyer. Now while the law has been upheld by the courts as valid, there are checks and balances. The problem in Kashmir is that these checks and balances are not followed and no effective remedy exists. So people have gone to courts against the wrong application of this law but it's taken too long for the courts to intervene, by which time a person spends months in detention.

PB: So basically we are talking about a huge climate of impunity outside impunity laws. Maybe this is a situation where an intervention is needed. What kind of intervention is possible?

KM: The state and the international community must first understand the reality of Jammu and Kashmir. The state of course understands it but refuses to act further. The present remedies on ground, whether it's the judiciary or the police and the other mechanisms, do not meet or do not address the widespread, historic nature of violence. It has been going on certainly for the last thirty years. There are a number of violations that have been taking place only some of which have been documented. So the most important step that needs to be taken is to have an honest conversation about what is happening. This has to happen of course at the domestic level but to an extent at the international level as well.

And I think the recent report of the UN was an important first step. The UN, for the first time through the High Commissioner's office in its human rights report, has looked at Jammu and Kashmir on both sides (Pakistan and India). And by doing that it has not reduced the situation of Jammu and Kashmir to yet another human rights situation in the region. It has looked at it as a unique problem and only when you do that is there hope of a unique solution.

Now, the judiciary is overburdened in India. As a lawyer and having worked in India, I certainly have belief in this judiciary and it's a long-term engagement, it's a process. **But the difficulty in Kashmir is that you got to apply this overburdened, struggling judicial system to an extraordinary situation. It does not work. If you look at the numbers of violations involved, the nature of crimes [involved], we talked about whether or not what's happening in Kashmir is genocide, crimes against humanity, armed conflict, or war crimes. There is no capacity, forget willingness—we can see there is no willingness to have an honest legal engagement on Kashmir—there is an inability which comes from trying to apply disingenuously an overburdened system meant for regular situations to an extraordinary situation.** And that is very important. For example, if the Indian state were to acknowledge the

nature of crimes, forget the numbers, just the nature of crimes and what has happened here and say that to actually start the conversation, to start this journey towards justice, certain extraordinary measures may need to be taken, special courts for example. This cannot be easy, certainly. But perhaps that is the only way by which a genuine conversation can begin between victims, human rights activists, parties to the dispute, and the Indian state.

PB: Obviously that's asking for a lot given how the Indian state and the international systems have responded to the situation in Kashmir. But people here have constantly responded to the situation—on the street. And the Indian state has constantly contested on the street almost daily resulting in violence and killings. With that background, many people, particularly Kashmiris, have described this situation as a military occupation. Is it so? Or does calling it a military occupation invite application of any international law, and what can that be?

KM: First, to answer the question of calling it an occupation or military occupation is a legal characterisation of a situation. And, yes, it would immediately then necessitate the parties to the dispute to accept international law. As a lawyer, I would be hesitant without having done the work in this manner of a discourse, as

opposed to legal submission, to reach that conclusion. **What's clear is this: There is an armed conflict situation which is ongoing. There are parties to this dispute—two nation states certainly involved and a number of militant groups organised to some extent though they don't control [any] territory. There are certain ingredients that suggest an ongoing armed conflict which may or may not be an international armed conflict and occupation. That's one. But more importantly, the work has to be done. And that is where the reluctance of the Indian state not just towards having that conversation (of whether it's an occupation or whether it's an armed conflict) but to even allow other people to have that conversation is a serious issue. Because you [don't] allow human rights activists, people on the ground, and organisations like the UN to engage in this conversation, you are effectively stopping this conversation. And that is the fundamental [principle] of international humanitarian law in my understanding: the moment a situation exists, the laws that apply must be allowed to exist and all parties to the dispute must be held accountable to those laws. So, it's a question of accountability which is why this conversation must happen, the legal case must be made out by human rights groups. A critique could then be a response to it. But what is most important is a war must be regulated.**

Obviously no one among Kashmiris, from my limited understanding, is invested in the state of war because they have seen the consequences of it. And they continue to see it. But it is extremely important to have these conversations and to make a legal case in a rigorous way. As you mentioned, there is a social understanding of occupation, war, and armed conflict. But there are also certain legal definitions which have to be looked at and a case made out. And it's important not for rhetorical reasons. It is important because the moment you do that, the state can then be held accountable by the laws that exist. And it's important that the language on the ground in a situation of a war is that of international humanitarian law.

PB: Absolutely, and in absence of which, people respond in protest, there's a militant movement, and there's also a political movement for the right of self-determination for decades and decades. But there are also peculiar ways of responding to the absence of structures that might promise delivery of justice. Like there are these silent protests around enforced disappearances. Would you like to talk about such protests, and what it means?

KM: Yes. Once the phenomenon of disappearances began in a very pronounced way in the 1990s, groups started engaging with the issue.

Families went to the courts, filed petitions, and certain individuals came together and decided that it was important to engage with this issue as an association. It was not enough to individually go to courts or protest, and the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) has been operating now for decades. The work of the association is of course to support members who seek to approach the courts. It is to document their own stories and to protest in peaceful but ways that draw attention to the individual stories for the larger issue. One of these ways is a silent protest held monthly in a public space but these are not the only forms of protest taking place. There are other groups and associations trying to do it differently.

The use of pellets shotguns was another phenomenon that was highlighted internationally and referred to in the UN Report as well. Many young people have been blinded. You now have groups of people trying to agitate against that issue and seek justice. So the idea of peaceful associations, the idea of documentation, the idea of collective voices is alive in Kashmir in very difficult circumstances. And it is very important. And it does not work in opposition to the individuals who may approach the court, individuals who may approach the UN. And I think all these work together to reinforce the

idea of and to highlight what is happening and ask for action.

PB: But at the same time, very little hope for anything to change soon. Can anything change anytime soon in your view?

KM: I don't see anything changing soon. I really can't comment on the political processes or what may or may not happen. From the point of view of a lawyer who is not engaged in those processes, whether at the Indian level or the Kashmiri level, it doesn't seem like anything will change soon. What I would like to say though, especially as I am leaving now after seven years here is that the human rights work as difficult as it is, which I've had the privilege of being a part of, is far from being hopeless, and far from being misguided, and far from being just shots in the dark. Not only are activists on the ground extremely brave and courageous, the victims share their stories courageously and go to the courts with great dignity. Not only this, the work has a very strong logic to it which I've had the privilege of witnessing from close quarters.

The documentation work is going on not only for the sake of documentation. A very strong argument from the ground is being built based on principles of law and principles of truth and justice and strong questions are

being asked not just of the Indian state but the international community as well. And I think as this work continues, there's a very clear logic which one would think as a lawyer can only convince all parties to the dispute that, one, until the dispute ends, everyone must follow the law domestic and international. And, two, that all parties to the dispute, including the United Nations, must address these fundamental issues of human rights violations. Crimes cannot continue. Rule of law must prevail. And that's the great thing about the ongoing work in Kashmir. Slow as it may be, difficult as it may be, a very strong argument based on internationally accepted principles of law are being built, fostered, and put forward.

PB: Perhaps the only place at the moment where any hope, if at all, can reside. Thank you very much, Kartik. It's been a really illuminating conversation. Thank you for this, thank you.

KM: Thank you. Thank you very much.
